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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study examined ways in which the writing behaviors of adult literacy students in a classroom setting were either similar to or different from current theories of language acquisition. Three students were selected from an adult literacy class at the Fordham Library Center in the Bronx. The research plan had a three-pronged approach: (1) background information was gathered through structured interviews with each student; (2) classroom observations were used to collect ethnographic data on students' writing processes in a natural setting; and (3) a composing aloud protocol was conducted to gain an indepth look at one student's writing process in one sitting from start to finish. A literature review was focused on three areas that appeared to share some common features: children's emergent literacy, college-age basic writing, and adult learning. Findings indicated that adult beginning writers seemed to go through many of the same developmental stages as children did. Unlike children, the adults seemed more self-conscious about the need to spell correctly and less willing to experiment with language and take risks. Adults' self-consciousness about the appearance of their writing and lack of spontaneity were much more similar to the writing behavior of basic writers in college. They had much in common with other adult learners having to juggle many complex factors in their lives to attend school. Questions for further research were identified. (29 references) (YLB)

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WRITING PROCESSES AND BEHAVIORS OF ADULT LITERACY STUDENTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

By Kathryn Schwertman and Melinda Corey
December 3, 1989

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I. INTRODUCTION

To date there has not been much research done on the teaching of writing to adults in literacy programs. The bulk of the research has been done either in the area of emergent literacy for children (Graves, Calkins, Holdaway, Harste Woodward & Burke) or in the area of basic writers in college (Perl, Shaughnessy) and in the area of secondary school education (Britton, Applebee, Emig). Most of the research in adult literacy has focused either on the teaching of reading, or on the socio,political-economic considerations of teaching adult students (Brookfield, Fingeret, Darkenwald & Valentine).

As teacher/researchers of the Saturday Writing Course funded by a Library Services and Construction Act Title VI grant at The New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing, an adult literacy program, we felt in a unique position to take a closer look at some of the writing processes of adult literacy students. Our goal was to give us greater insight into teaching writing to adult literacy students and to benefit other teachers and ourselves. Since we could not find any other studies which specifically examined the writing of adult literacy students, we designed our research plan based on existing studies done with children and basic writers. We did not have specific hypotheses to test for. Rather, we aimed at a broad approach to studying writing in order to generate questions for further research.

As a result, we set for our research plan a three pronged approach: structured interviews, classroom observations and a composing aloud protocol. Background information was gathered

through structured interviews on each student. Classroom observations were employed to gather ethnographic data on students' writing processes in a natural setting while interacting with the teacher and other students. A composing aloud protocol was conducted to gain an in-depth look at one student's writing process in one sitting from start to finish. We were then able to balance an in-depth, albeit artificial look at student writing, with a more holistic, in-class observation of their writing. Due to time and money constraints, we chose a total of three students to focus on. Our choice was made on the following considerations: students who would be dependable and come to class regularly, and students who would be good informants.

The planning for the research was done by a committee of five people: Roger Dovner, Director of The Centers for Reading and Writing (CRW); Diane Rosenthal and Karen Griswold, Literacy Specialists for the CRW; and two teachers in the Saturday Writing Course who agreed to conduct the research project: Kathryn Schwertman and Barbara Greenfield. The chosen site for research was the Fordham Library Center in the Bronx where Schwertman and Greenfield were currently teaching writing to an adult literacy class of 20 students. Three students were selected for the study. Schwertman and Greenfield agreed to do the interviews and composing aloud protocol, but for the in-class observations a third researcher was hired, Melinda Corey, since it was felt that the classroom researcher should be an outside participant whose sole function in the class would be to make observations and type up field notes.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to understand how adult literacy students fit into the current field of existing research, we focused on three areas which appear to share some common features: Children's Emergent Literacy, College Age Basic Writers, and Adult Learning.

A. Research In Children's Emergent Literacy

There has been extensive research in the area of emergent literacy for children. Researchers such as Graves, Calkins, Holdaway, Jaggar & Smith-Burke, Harste, Woodward & Burke, have documented how children learn to read and write, and their strategies for reading and writing. Graves' research shows some of the strategies children use are invented spelling, drawing, sub-vocalizing, rehearsing ideas through role play or conversations with peers. Calkins' research demonstrates the process of how children internalize the questions that are asked about their writing. The research of Harste, Woodward and Burke demonstrates the importance of drawings for children in learning to read and write. Research by Jaggar and Smith-Burke demonstrates the importance of talk in making connections between reading and writing. The field of emergent literacy also revolves around debates between a top-down, whole language model of learning reading and writing that is meaning-based, versus a model which is bottom-up, with an emphasis on learning reading and writing through phonics and learning of discrete language skills. Increasingly, research shows that literacy acquisition is closely tied to reading and writing for meaning.

B. Research on Basic Writers

In addition to the large field of research on children's emergent literacy, there has also been much research done on college student writers, especially in the field of the basic writer. Sondra Perl's research on basic writers demonstrates that they operate often on a confused and idiosyncratic understanding of grammar rules and interrupt the writing process constantly to focus on error. Shaughnessy's basic writers demonstrate that they have a tendency to drop out little words like 'a', and 'the'. Students also have trouble recognizing sentence boundaries and have difficulty recognizing errors when proofreading. Afro-Americans in particular have trouble distinguishing 's' and 'ed' endings, and experience a lot of trouble with dialect interference. They are made to feel dumb and stupid for their inability to write standard English. Another distinctive feature of college age basic writers is the specific way in which their notions of reading and writing have been conditioned by their previous schooling. Research on college students' revision strategies by Nancy Sommers demonstrates that students tend to revise by adding information. They open up the text and stick things in, rather than reconceptualizing the piece. The research also demonstrates that talking either to others or to oneself facilitates the revision process.

C. Research on Adult Learners

Last of all is the field of research in adult learning. Most of the research has been carried out on white low-income or middle-class populations. The research by Brookfield and Darkenwald shows that adults face many responsibilities and obligations that

condition their learning in terms of time, money, and childcare. Adults carry with them a long history of learning experiences and styles which also condition their learning process. As a result, their research shows that adults learn best under conditions that are flexible to help them accommodate the other demands in their lives. They also do best when learning can be meaningfully related to current practical needs in their adult lives. Last of all, adults learn best when their psychological history as learners is taken into consideration, especially around issues of self-esteem and learning style.

D. Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Despite the three separate strands of research on children, basic writers and adult learners, there are no studies which take a close look at the specific ways in which the writing behaviors of adult literacy students in a classroom setting are either similar or different from the current theories about language acquisition.

By closely observing the writing behavior of three adult literacy students in class and asking them questions about their behaviors, we hoped to answer some of the following questions:

1. To what extent are students influenced by the lessons?
2. How much actual time is spent writing versus other activities (like getting coffee, going to the bathroom, talking with other students, looking up words in the dictionary, etc.).
3. What is the level of interaction and participation of adult students with their peers?

4. How much informal learning goes on between students? Through the use of a composing aloud protocol with one student, we hoped to gain insight into:

1) What are students thinking when they pause in their writing?
2) Why do students sometimes stop in the middle of writing a piece and return to the beginning to re-read?

Last of all, we hoped to better understand some of the specific ways that adult literacy students in the Saturday Writing Class either fit or did not fit the current theories of language and learning for children, basic writers and adult learners so that we might improve adult literacy instruction in our classroom.

III. THE SETTING AND INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

The Setting

The site chosen for the research project was the Fordham Library Center of The New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing where the Saturday Writing Class was held from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The setting consisted of a classroom with five round tables. Each table seated approximately five students. The room was comfortable, well-lit and inviting, with books and maps lining the walls, cabinets for storing supplies, photographs and student writing pinned up on a bulletin board, a movable blackboard on an easel and a table with copies of various newspapers and previous journal publications of student work. In the back of the room was a set-up for coffee, tea and snacks.

The Instructional Model

The writing process approach was the primary pedagogical model used for the teaching of writing to adults in the Saturday Writing Class. This model was based on the theories of Calkins, Murray, Vygotsky, Britton, Smith, Heath and Labov which sets forth the following premises:

1) Learning is a social activity and therefore takes place best in an interactive classroom (Vygotsky, Britton);

2) All writers, even beginners, have a unique writing process and engage in writing as an attempt to create meaning (Murray);

3) Writers learn to write by writing (Smith);

4) Language has functional meanings to individuals and is culturally shaped by each person's uses of language and the uses of language of their community (Heath, Labov).

As a result of the above theoretical premises, the teacher/researchers chose a pedagogical model in which students set their own goals, chose their own writing topics, and worked individually and in small group settings where informative talk and responses to other students' ideas and writing were encouraged. The instructional approaches and time frame used were:

1. Lessons (30 minutes) Teachers would present a short lesson or collaborative learning exercise on aspects of writing such as revision, editing, description, etc.

2. Writing and Conferencing (90 minutes) A substantial amount of time was spent on writing and writing conferences.

* Writing - In keeping with the whole language viewpoint that people learn to read and write primarily through experience with reading and writing, substantial parts

of the class were spent with people working on their own writing.

* Conferences - While students worked on their writing the teachers conferenced individually with students on their writing. A conference might include help finding a topic to write about, a discussion about possible revisions in the piece, or some help with spelling and punctuation. Teachers also encouraged students to have conferences with each other.

3. Share session (40 minutes). Students had frequent opportunities to find out how others were responding to their writing. Small and large groups of students met regularly to read drafts of pieces to each other and find out what others in the group liked about the writing, and suggestions they might have

4. Journals (20 minutes). Students were asked to write down in a journal their own observations about their writing. For example, people might write down how they go about finding a topic, or their observations about revision.

5. Writing Folders. In addition, each student was asked to keep a folder with all their writing in it for the duration of the 14 week cycle.

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The following methods were used to gather information: Structured Interviews and Classroom Observations of all three students selected for the study, and a Composing Aloud Protocol with one of the students.

A. Interviews

A structured interview was designed covering five headings: Family Background, Education, Work Experience, School Experience, Concept of Reading, Concept of Writing. (See Appendix A) After the interview questions were designed, three students were selected as subjects to be interviewed: Mamie, Betty and Ralph. Students were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B) before beginning the interviews. The interviews took 3-4 hours for each student. The main purpose of the interviews was to help give the researchers a context for the student's learning.

B. Classroom Observations

A researcher, Melinda Corey, was hired to do participant/observation in the classroom for a total of five Saturdays, 3 hours each class period. Betty and Ralph were both observed twice and Mamie was observed only once as a result of two absences from class (See Appendices E1, E2, I, K1, K2 for observations).

The researcher's strategy was to position herself quietly alongside the writer, as unobtrusively as possible at an angle where she could see the paper and words the student was writing. She kept a timeline running vertically on the page and indicated the passing of time in minutes. All behavior was recorded in as much detail as possible. As questions arose, the researcher jotted them down for later interview. Occasionally, the researcher interrupted the student to ask a question such as, "When you count backwards all the words in the sentence you just wrote, what are you doing?" These informal questions provided

additional insight into the student's behavior at that point. The researcher tried not to interfere as much as possible, and tried to save most questions for the follow-up interview.

The observations were later typed up and annotated with the researcher's interpretations, questions and comments. Copies of the observations and transcript were typed, xeroxed and distributed to the other two researchers involved in the project. At each research meeting, all three researchers participated in coding the student's behavior according to the following categories: Revises, Re-reads, Edits, Researcher Interference, Planning.

The classroom observations allowed us as researchers to observe students' natural, unsupervised writing behavior within an instructional setting. The over-all goal of the observations was to learn more about patterns in the student's writing process and patterns in the writing process for other adult literacy students.

C. Composing Aloud Protocol

Composing aloud was chosen as a method for providing us with a glimpse of the student's thought process while composing. The use of a composing aloud protocol and coding sheet for analysis was based on Sondra Perl's 1970 study of 6 basic writers in college in which students were asked to "say as much as they can of whatever is going on in their minds while they are writing" (Perl, p. 32; Appendix C). No such study had been done with adult literacy student writers, in which the student's internal thought process was evoked and analyzed. Therefore, we felt it worthwhile to build into our study a composing aloud protocol.

The procedure was as follows: The student was asked in one sitting to compose a piece of writing on a topic of their own choice, and to simultaneously think aloud everything as nearly as possible what was going on in their mind while they were composing. In selecting a subject for this portion of the research, we had some initial doubts whether or not an inexperienced writer at the level of our students could do the composing aloud protocol. We were worried it might provide too much cognitive strain since the students still had to spend a lot of their mental energy on forming letters, retrieving sight words from memory, keeping track of one's thought process, sounding out unfamiliar words, etc. As a result, we picked one of our more verbal students, Mamie, for this part of the research. It was felt that she would best be able to do thinking aloud while writing.

Mamie met with Kathryn Schwertman, one of the teacher/researchers, for 3 one-hour training sessions to practice the procedure. On the fourth session, the researcher sat at a table with the student. The student was instructed to write on a topic of her choice until done, a request that closely duplicated the kind of writing situation students encountered in class. A tape recorder was placed on the table and the researcher sat next to the student at an angle where she could observe the student's piece. The student was asked to write on one sheet of paper at a time on the table with a sharp pencil so that the tape recorder would pick up the clicking sound of the pencil on the paper. This was so the researcher could determine in transciption exactly when the student started and stopped writing. The researcher recorded

significant paralinguistic behaviors such as consulting a dictionary, pointing with her finger, etc. and any other relevant notes or questions, etc. on paper, next to a time line. Occasionally when the student fell into silence, forgetting to speak her thoughts aloud, the researcher prompted the writer as gently as possible, saying, "Could you tell me what you're thinking?"

Although Mamie was a fairly verbal student, she appeared to have trouble in trying to concentrate both on her writing and thinking aloud at the same time. As a result she tended to fall silent, forgetting to compose aloud when she became engrossed in figuring out how to spell a word or what to write next. As a result, upon the conclusion of Mamie's protocol, the researcher used the additional method of asking Mamie to talk through her piece from beginning to end, re-telling as much as she could remember what she had been thinking. Her re-telling was assisted by occasional prods and prompts from the researcher who asked questions based on notes taken during the composing aloud protocol.

In the future, the researcher recommended using the method of re-tellings rather than the composing aloud protocols with adult literacy students who find it difficult to compose and think aloud simultaneously.

After taping the composing aloud protocol, the protocol was transcribed and analyzed following Perl's procedure which consists of "listening to the tape and determining the function each behavior has in the process; constructing a timeline; and placing the code for each unit on the timeline to produce a composing style sheet (Perl, p. 36; Appendix C). The researcher

typed up the transcript by dividing each page into three vertical columns. The right column was used for typing up the transcript. The left side of the paper was used to record the observations and codes using Sondra Perl's coding scheme:

PL	Planning
C	Commenting
Rh	Rehearsing (trying out ideas verbally without writing)
Rh---	Rehearsing leading to writing
SW	Speaking the words while writing
R	Revising
RR	Re-reading
W	Writing (drafting)
S	pauses or periods of silence
RI	Researcher intervention (Perl, p. 39; Appendix C)

The codes were then analyzed and transferred to a coding sheet similar to the one used by Perl in her study of basic writers. (See pp. 65-66; Appendix C). This involved coding each sentence in the piece and then noting each code on the timeline (Perl, pp. 53-56; Appendix C). This process allowed the researchers to analyze what was going on in the transcript, particularly how long it took each student to compose each sentence. Other information could also be obtained, including:

-- The strategies used during the preparatory period

-- The amount of time spent writing each sentence

-- The behaviors that occurred while each sentence was being written

-- When sentences were written in groups or 'chunks' (fluent writing)

-- When sentences were written in isolation (choppy or sporadic writing)

-- When revising and editing occurred

-- The frequency of revising and editing behavior

-- Where and in what frequency pauses or periods of silence occurred (Perl, p. 60; Appendix C)

V. CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY #1 - MAMIE

Background (Appendix D)

Mamie is a talkative grandmother of about 60, separated from her husband, who grew up in South Carolina and now lives in the Bronx. Based on a three hour interview with Mamie, the following information was obtained about her background in terms of family, education and work experiences.

Mamie was a middle child of eight. When she was very young, Mamie's mother sent her to work in the tobacco fields, where she hoed the land and succered (pinched back) tobacco flowers. When she was eight years old, however, her primary job became caring for her younger siblings while her mother worked, making three dollars a day as a housekeeper "for the white people."

She began school at seven and remembers it fondly. "There were a lot of kids. Teacher was nice, the place was warm." Her school work consisted of ABCs, Dick and Jane readers, and spelling. She "zoomed" through her first year. The discipline did not bother her: "We had to study," she said. But there was peer pressure to be nicely dressed, and she says, "When you had no pretty dress, no books, only one or two friends...don't care." The problem was exacerbated when she fell behind because her family duties kept her from class. "Imagine being out two to three days a week," she said. "They are so far ahead, you don't know what to do." Another problem was not having money to pay for books. Even when her father, who lived in Baltimore, sent her fifteen dollars a week for school expenses, her mother "took it to buy

cabbage and fish for our big meal on Sunday." Funds from a school teacher, who had hired Mamie as a laundress to make money for her schoolbooks, were also taken to support the family. After five years of spotty attendance, Mamie gave up.

Throughout the years, Mamie saw relatives and friends going to school, having fun, moving on, and she wanted to go, too. "All my life," she says, "I wanted something and I couldn't get it. It gives me headaches. I feel I can't do it."

Among the other jobs she has held are babysitter, office cleaner, presser, factory worker and garment maker. She has also received public assistance. These jobs required little or no reading, and no one at her various workplaces knew of her reading and writing problems. When she improves her reading and writing, she hopes to get a job as a nurse's aide. "I want to help people," she says.

Now, 28 years after she left any type of schooling, she has started adult literacy classes. She was enrolled in a Bronx high school program, but left because of its level of difficulty and job constraints. With the Saturday writing class she now attends, she is able to get help around the house from her daughter, who cooks for the family. A friend, who just learned of her 'problem', gives Mamie "all kinds of help." Her daughter also helps her with spelling or "anything I don't understand." The only conflict her daughter introduces is that she wants Mamie's writing to "be perfect."

Observations (Appendices E1, E2)

When Mamie first arrived she was terrified of writing because she had not been to school in so long. She had trouble concentrating at first due to nervousness. Once her nervousness vanished, though, Mamie brought to her work the same desire and commitment to learning that she spoke of having as a child. Mamie set three goals for herself as a writer: 1) to learn to express her thoughts, 2) to master spelling, 3) to build up her confidence in writing and go for the GED.

In class Mamie kept a little box of cards on which she wrote words she was trying to memorize for spelling. Often during class discussion Mamie would study her words quietly at the table rather than paying attention to the rest of the class. This concern for spelling and mastering words carried over into her daily life. She spoke of strategies she had used over the years and still used in order to work on her spelling. When she used to work at the sewing machine, she would copy down the word for the day in lipstick onto the sewing machine table. While sewing, she would study the word. If the supervisor came around she would quickly erase the word and then after the supervisor left, re-write the word and continue studying.

She also talked about her strategy of buying a newspaper and then sitting next to some people having a conversation about a particular news event. She would turn to the same page as them and look for words they would mention as they discussed the event; words like "president" or "mayor". She would then copy the words down and study them for the day and try and read the

article. Instinctively Mamie seemed to understand that acquiring a context of meaning for a piece would help her to read.

In terms of spelling, Mamie often studied her words in her little box quietly at the table rather than paying attention to or participating in class discussion. This preoccupation and self-absorption carried over into her writing. Although Mamie usually began writing fairly quickly after sitting down (5-10 minutes), she would soon become stuck on spelling or interrupt herself to revise previous sentences. If she didn't know how to spell a word, the teachers encouraged her to draw a line to substitute for the difficult word and continue writing. However, Mamie complained that "I should underline nothing...That's the problem with drawing lines. I forget what I am writing."

Another frustration around spelling for Mamie was having to choose easier words because she could not spell the words she wanted. "My first thought is my best thought," Mamie said, "but sometimes I have to take second choice." Thus, Mamie's concern for spelling was in part related to her concern for meaning; i.e., she often limited the expression of her meaning rather than risk using a word she didn't know how to spell. Mamie's concern for meaning also was revealed in her frequent complaint that she had an idea in her head but could not express it on paper. For example, she said, "I had this story in my head but not like I'm writing it. If I had written like I wanted to write it, it would have a bigger flow."

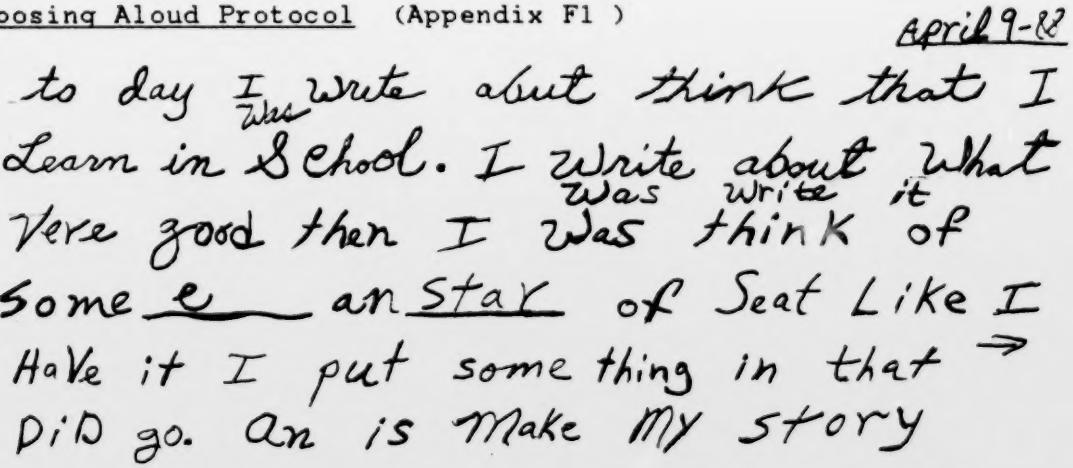
Related to spelling, Mamie was also very concerned about the cosmetic appearance of her writing. Often no matter how well Mamie thought she had expressed her ideas on paper, she would complain about her penmanship, the erasings, the insertions, the scratching out. For example, Mamie often erased misspelled words and replaced them with correct spellings saying "So messy" to herself. When asked about this practice, she said, "I have a bad handwriting. Too much scratching makes the paper look terrible...[writing] should look nice, pretty."

As a writer, Mamie, more than most students, seemed to respond to ideas about the process of writing. Perhaps this was related to her intuitive concern for getting her ideas across and seeing writing as a means of communication with others. As a result, Mamie seemed very interested in the class lessons on revising and began to internalize strategies for revising her own pieces. For example, when sharing her writing with other students, Mamie would routinely ask other students to listen for whether the writing "makes sense" or whether "you can understand what I'm saying."

Mamie also wrote about the need to communicate through writing: "You have to know what you want to write so people can understand it. If they don't understand it, you just stop." She also spent one whole share session soliciting other students' opinions about whether the opening of her story was interesting enough and clear. She worried that the opening of her story was confusing or boring and that her readers would not want to continue.

Likewise, Mamie demonstrated concern for editing sentences according to meaning, even while writing in the middle of a piece. For example, she often would pause while writing to re-read what she had written so far and comment, "Sometimes you write and write and write, and you re-read, and there's so many things missing." As a result, whenever Mamie would re-read her piece, she often added words or sentences that she felt she had left out, or she would erase a word and replace it with a better word that she felt in retrospect expressed her meaning better. Thus, Mamie's goal was always two-fold: 1) clarifying and expressing her thoughts, and 2) correcting errors in syntax and spelling to make the piece as perfect as possible.

Composing Aloud Protocol (Appendix F1)


April 9-88
to day I Was write about think that I
Learn in School. I write about What
Was write it
Vere good then I Was think of
Some e an Stay of Seat Like I
Have it I put some thing in that
DiD go. an is Make My story

1. Description of the Composing Aloud Protocol

When asked to start writing, Mamie began by spending 35 seconds thinking aloud and rehearsing what she would do:

> ...I should a wrote about today. I wrote the piece and then all of a sudden I sat there and read it and stick something in there. I couldn't even fit in...it didn't fit in the story once I started reading and that like throw'd me because it stopped me from reading what I really had wrote. Let me think... (ls. 1-8)

Mamie then paused for 25 seconds with her pencil poised over the page and finally wrote one word - 'today'.

> Let me think... (10 sec)...Let me see (10 sec)....Today (ls. 8-9)

In the second minute, Mamie paused for 30 seconds and wrote only one-half sentence:

> I was writing about things that I learned (pause, 30 sec) in school (ls. 11-13)

For most of the third minute, Mamie rehearsed aloud what she wanted to say next:

> "I wrote, wrote about what I learnt in the last 13 weeks" (ls. 15-17)

She then wrote the two words: "I write" instead of "I wrote" (line 17). At this point the researcher interrupted (ls. 20-23), possibly causing Mamie to lose her train of thought, because instead of returning to finish the second sentence which she had intended to write, Mamie spent the fourth minute re-reading everything she had written so far (ls. 25-26) and ended by adding two more words: 'about what' (line 26) - which is a continuation of the second sentence she had begun. The re-reading strategy seemed to help her remember what she had been planning to say before the interruption. Mamie then paused 15 seconds and appeared to be lost in thought (line 27).

The fifth minute began with the researcher interrupting again to gently prod, "Tell me what you're thinking" (ls. 29-30). Mamie explained that she was "thinking about how to write this sentence" (ls. 33-35) - meaning her second sentence. She then

spent the remainder of the fifth minute re-reading her first sentence a second time, adding the word "was" (line 35) and then planning aloud her revision of the second sentence:

> ...Today I was writing about things I learnt in school, and I was writing, very good, o.k.; I was writing very good (pause 15 sec.)
>
> (ls. 35-38)

When Mamie said "o.k." she appeared to have found the right words to use to write her sentence. She repeated "I was writing very good" once more to herself, and then after 15 seconds of pausing, she spent the sixth minute writing the sentence down on her paper (ls. 41-47). What's interesting here is that instead of crossing out the first way she had begun sentence two ("I write about what"), she writes the new version underneath it ("was write it"), preserving the first version:

> I write about what
> was write it ... (See Appendix F2 for writing sample; sentence 2)

This sequence of events reveals Mamie's concern for finding the best formulation of words to express her thought. She did not hesitate to reconsider the sentence she had begun and make revisions. The strategy of re-reading seemed to help her think through what she was trying to say.

In the seventh minute Mamie seemed to be gaining momentum and finished writing her second sentence, using underlining, rather than stopping to dwell on spelling (ls. 47-49). For example:

> some e an star (line 47)

She did, however, pause after writing the words "I put something". She repeated aloud the words:

else, something else (ls. 49-50)

She seemed to be confusing what she wanted to say here with what she wrote in the previous sentence "something else" where she paused to struggle with the spelling. It appears that sub-consciously Mamie was still worrying about how to spell "something else' and this distracted her. However, in repeating the words aloud again, she seemed to remember what she was intending to say and ended by switching to the word "in" instead of "else" (line 51). This seemed to get her back on track, because she immediately resumed writing, and with only a 10 second pause, she finished writing the rest of the sentence with little interruption:

...I put something, something in that didn't go, An it (pause; 10 sec.) It didn't go and it made (pause) my story go bad. (ls. 49-52)

What's interesting here is that she had no trouble spelling "something", whereas in the previous sentence she had to draw a blank, perhaps because she was preoccupied with how to spell the word following it: "else". She seemed to lump "some", "thing" and "else" together when she wrote on her paper: 'some__e____' (l. 46) for 'something else' (l. 45).

2. Analysis of Protocol

An analysis of the first seven minutes of Mamie's protocol reveals findings similar to some aspects of Perl's findings with

basic writers in college: 1) writing as a recursive feature and 2) frequent editing and attention paid to cosmetic appearances of the writing.

In Perl's study of basic writers she notes that

> ...students wrote by shuttling from the sense of what they wanted to say forward to the words on the page and back from the words on the page to their intended meaning. This "back and forth" movement appeared to be a recursive feature: at one moment students were writing, moving their ideas and their discourse forward; at the next they were back-tracking, rereading, and digesting what had been written (Perl, p. 330; Appendix G).

In the first seven minutes of composing, Mamie backtracks and re-reads three times which leads to the addition of a word in the first sentence, a revision of the second sentence, and the planning for the third sentence. Her behavior of re-reading her sentences or rehearsing sentences aloud before writing them concurs with Perl's conclusion that

> ...Composing does not occur in a straightforward, linear fashion. The process is one of accumulating discrete bits down on the paper and then working from those bits to reflect upon, structure, and then further develop what one means to say. It can be thought of as a kind of "retrospective structuring"; movement forward occurs only after one has reached back, which in turn occurs only after one has some sense of where one wants to go. Both aspects, the reaching back and the sensing forward, have a clarifying effect (Perl, p. 331; Appendix G).

In addition, protocol analysis reveals Mamie's concern for constant editing and correcting of surface errors and spelling to the point of distracting or interrupting herself. This is similar to Perl's observations that:

> ...soon after students began writing their first drafts, they began to edit, and they continued to do so.....While editing, the students were concerned with a variety of items: the lexicon (i.e., spelling, word choice, and the context of words); the syntax (i.e., grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure); and the discourse as a whole (i.e., organization, coherence, and audience) (Perl, p. 331; Appendix G).

Similar to Perl's basic writer, Mamie began editing almost immediately; e.g., before completing her second sentence she was already re-reading and editing her first sentence. She also stopped frequently to puzzle over spellings to the point of distracting herself. For example, she interrupted her chain of thought in sentence two in order to figure out how to spell "else". Then in the following sentence her preoccupation with "else" caused interference in composing the last half of the sentence.

While Mamie was similar to Perl's basic writer in her concern with spelling, word choice and the context of words, she showed no concern for grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure, and only a passing consideration for organization, coherence and audience in her opening remarks where she decided her ideas about writing would not fit into her previous piece: "I couldn't even fit in..it didn't fit in the story once I started reading," and so she decided to put her ideas into a new piece of writing. One possible explanation for her lack of attention to grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure is because she had not yet been formally taught these things. Also, the Saturday Writing Class encourages students to revise for meaning and clarity

first, and to edit for errors later after the piece is finished. As a result, Mamie's primary focus was on getting her meaning across. In terms of meaning, she was much more concerned about spelling and choosing the right word to express herself. This she shared in common with Perl's basic writer. Although there were also times when Mamie thought about organization and audience, she seemed still to write largely for herself, and somewhat inconsistently would consider her audience, especially if it was a piece she meant to share with others.

Despite Mamie's concern with spelling and word choice, she did not appear to be as concerned overall as the basic writer with spelling and grammar rules. Again, this is probably due in part to the fact that she had such little schooling experience that she does not have the long entrenched history of schooling that a college age basic writer has. She does not yet know the rules of grammar, nor does she have a long history of having her papers marked up in red ink by teachers. Her interruptions and editing seem more directed at clarifying meaning; attention paid to spelling is related to her efforts to find the right word to express herself. Mamie appears to feel freer than Perl's basic writer to draw lines when she doesn't know how to spell a word and return later to try and figure it out.

Also similar to Perl's basic writer, Mamie made miscues in writing and re-reading her own text. This is indicated on the Protocol Sheet (Appendix F1) where the words which she wrote are placed underneath the words she spoke. She frequently read

in words that were not on the page, left out words when writing, and would read or write words incorrectly spelled without changing them. Perl refers to this phenomenon as "selective perception" and argues that students

> ...Habitually reread their papers from internal semantic or meaning models. They extracted the meaning they wanted from the minimal cues on the page ....they 'read in' [missing] words even when they were absent; in other words, they reduced uncertainty by operating as though what was in their heads was already on the page (Perl, p. 332; Appendix G).

It is debatable whether or not "selective perception" is a result of "reducing uncertainty" for Mamie. Another interpretation might be that for the adult literacy student, as well as for skilled readers, people read for meaning and use the context from their own base of knowledge to fill in where gaps exist. Thus, when words are left out, Mamie automatically fills them in while re-reading, which is also what a skilled reader would tend to do, not to reduce uncertainty , but simply to create instinctively a sentence that "sounds right". The "minimal cues" which Perl refers to on the page, become then, for the beginning writer, a courageous first attempt at putting down meaning using inventive spelling strategies.

CASE STUDY # 2 - BETTY

Background (Appendix H)

Betty is a reserved woman of about 70, also separated from her husband, who grew up in North Carolina and now lives in the Bronx. Her mother was unmarried; her father lived in a nearby town. Betty lived with her mother, her mother's sister, three brothers and sisters, cousins, and her grandmother. Her grandparents had been slaves.

At the age of seven, she began work sharecropping with her mother; when she was ten, her family started working on a truck farm. The work consisted of "digging potatoes, picking beans, setting out potatoes, chopping the grass on peanuts, and getting green tobacco." Like Mamie, she was put in charge of taking care of the house. She worked in the fields during the day while the other children were at school and took care of them when they came home.

Despite these responsibilities, Betty started school when she was six and attended sporadically for nine years. For most of the time she attended, the school year ran for only six months, punctuated by planting and harvesting cycles. Her school was crowded into one room; the subjects were reading, writing, math, and spelling; there was no library - "I didn't find out 'till later what a library was, " she says.

On the way home from school when she was 15, she was kidnapped and forced into marriage. While Betty's mother protested the

marriage, the kidnapper and his mother posed as Betty's parents and obtained a marriage license.

Betty's mother was able to forestall the marriage for two or three years, but the kidnapping ended Betty's schooling. She had completed the fourth grade. All of her siblings and cousins went to school and learned to read and write.

In Betty's childhood home, there was a family Bible, but she did not read it. Only one letter was ever received by the family. Betty liked writing, with "big, nice writing pencils" on "big old thick writing tablets" that "she would let last...a long time." Her parents "didn't ever have no schooling," she said, so she didn't know whether they would consider it important for their children. But Betty considered it important: "I wish I'd a known then as now; I'd of taught my mother to read and write... All of us could have learned together, kept on learning. We just had to work all the time. That's what I thought life was."

Thirty years ago, after living for several years with her husband (the man who kidnapped her) and raising her family, Betty left. She came to New York and found jobs as a "sleep-in" housekeeper and elderly home-care worker. About ten years ago, when she was in her early 60's, she went back to school, first through a New York City program called the Exchange Program, later through a community-based program. After one and a half years, she was given "a certificate" and sent to another program at a community college, and from there she came to the Fordham branch of the NYPL Centers for Reading and Writing.

Her family and friends have been supportive of her return to school, and she hopes that she will set an example that keeps her grandchildren from dropping out. Although she would like to get her GED, she does not have any job goals related to her schooling. She feels, however, that "if I had learned reading and writing better I could have gotten a better job."

Of her ideas of good writing, she believes that "the way thoughts are in" a piece of writing determines its worth. It has to do with "the way it starts, and the endings," along with making the words "sound right" and using punctuation and standard grammar.

Over the years, she feels her writing has improved because she knows how to choose a topic, put ideas down, make "letters better," use spelling strategies, and place capital letters and periods. She keeps a journal, and likes to write mysteries and stories about herself and her family.

She also feels that writing has changed her life: "Before I went to the literacy program...I stayed in the house all the time....When I started coming to Fordham, it felt like something came over me. Since then I go out more. Being able to write most anything makes a difference".

Observations (Appendix I)

Betty was one of the most dedicated students in the Centers for Reading and Writing ABE classes. She had been coming for two years at the time of the study and spent a great deal of time in ABE classes in addition to the Saturday Writing class. She also worked on the computers at The Fordham Center several days a

week. At the time of the study Betty already had a substantial folder of writings - some complete, others incomplete. Betty was almost always the first student to show up on a Saturday morning. She would come early, she said, in order to get settled and look through her writing folder before the class began. When the class would begin she would already have a clear idea of what she wanted to work on and would begin writing within five to ten minutes. She frequently returned to pieces which she had started in the past but were still incomplete. Betty explained that she liked to begin pieces and then to put them aside, let them "set a bit" until she was ready to return to that topic later. She would then pick up where she had left off, or revise and start over again. If she was deciding to begin a new topic, she would quietly gather her thoughts and then begin writing fairly quickly and fluently, almost free-writing, with very little editing as she went along. In class she would write silently, although at home she would talk aloud while composing. She composed silently in class, she explained, so as not to disturb the other students.

At the time that the observations were made, Betty had recently caught on to the whole idea of revising and often cut her stories into different pieces with scissors, rearranged the pieces, threw some of them out, scotch-taped what remained onto another sheet of paper and added new sections where needed. After making the revisions she wanted, she would copy the whole piece over neatly and then either return it to her folder or type it up on the computer later in the week. As a writer, Betty had a strong

talent for descriptive writing and often wrote pieces about nature, the seasons, and the weather.

Regarding spelling, Betty did not seem too concerned about it, perhaps because she felt comfortable with the technique taught her to draw a line when she didn't know how to spell a word and continue writing. When asked about her use of this technique Betty replied, "Yes, I do it a lot...I draw lines for those words [I can't spell]." She also would underline words whose spelling she had guessed at. When asked why she didn't erase or cross out many words as she wrote, Betty explained, "I'm learning not to erase. I want to get it completely so I don't have to erase." Betty, who has been in The Saturday Writing Class for two years, indicates by her comment that she has been learning that getting her ideas down is more important than stopping to check every word. However, on occasion she would still express concern for the appearance of her writing. For example, she often worried about the appearance of her handwriting and was pleased when she felt it was beginning to improve: "It [my handwriting] look much nicer now...steadier and easier to read."

CASE STUDY # 3 - RALPH

Background (Appendix J)

Ralph is an affectionate gregarious man of about thirty who grew up in the country of Jamaica and moved to New York in his twenties where he has been working as a plumber.

Ralph was the youngest of 12 children. His father worked on a boat and his mother would sell fish and fruits in the public

marketplace. When Ralph was five, his father died suddenly from a stroke: "When he died, everything go downhill for us." His other brothers and sisters had already left home and "they all got through school except me," said Ralph. He was the only one left to take care of his mother who was poor and had trouble making ends meet. The other brothers and sisters apparently did not help either Ralph or his mother. "They could have helped us, but no, it was the other way around; I help them." Ralph seems to have experienced a lot of betrayal and anger around being the only child not to have gotten a chance to get through school.

As a result of the father's death, poverty and insecurity became the themes of Ralph's life. His mother made him go to school, but he was always anxious and worried about her and would often "scull" school (play hookey) in order to help her. He worried that she would get sick or die and felt that he had to help her earn money:

> I used to cry and worry my mother would die...I missed her! I was afraid something would happen to her! ....She have to walk for so many miles, and that also keep me from school, maybe 3, 4 times a week, I'd help her carry the baskets of berries, mangos, fish."

Ralph's schooling was thus very erratic. He also was often late to school because he would stop off in the mango fields to eat something for breakfast or he would leave school at lunch time to go to the fields to eat. This was because his mother often did not have the money or resources to give him breakfast and lunch, and he would be hungry. Whenever he was late to school he would be beaten.

Ralph was also beaten a lot by the school teachers for not being able to read and write and for not having his homework. Ralph spent a great deal of energy in the interview describing all the various people in school who beat him including the range of weapons used such as rocks, leather strops, rulers, canes, and cuffing him with the hand. "He described how teachers would sneak up behind him and hit him hard on the back. Other times the teacher would "strike your hands with a leather strop, first one hand then the other until both hands be flaming red". Or the teacher would hit his arms until "there would be red welts where she would hit me with the cane" He obviously became very traumatized over so many beatings and as he explained, it is difficult to learn while being beaten so much: "They would hit you on the head and say: "That's not the way to do it!" And if you had an idea in your head, poof, it's gone!" When reading aloud the teacher would "conk you on the head".

At age ten, after a particularly severe beating by the principal, Ralph said something in him snapped. He grabbed the cane and began hitting the principal instead. He was thrown out of school after this incident, and only with the pleading and intercession of his mother and the local priest was he readmitted to school. However, the beatings stopped after that.

Although Ralph "sculled" a lot, he continued to stay in school off and on until age 13 because his mother insisted he keep going, but as Ralph said, "I didn't like it no more. I saw no pleasure in it [school]". Ralph was also humiliated in school

because of his poverty; e.g., not having shoes and good clothes or a professional haircut like other children. This meant that he was teased a lot and beaten up by the older boys who would bully him.

At age 13 Ralph left school because his mother did not have money to pay for further schooling. Ralph worked as a teenager doing masonry and painting. From ages 19 to 22 he worked as a sailor on a fishing charter. At age 23 he came to New York and got a job working for a plumber and eventually married and settled down. It was in New York that he saw an ad on T.V. about learning to read and write. He figured if the guy on T.V. could learn to read and write, then he could too. He contacted the Centers for Reading and Writing at age 28 and has been coming ever since.

In contrast to his childhood experiences with education, Ralph spoke very enthusiastically of his learning experience in New York. He spoke fondly of his teacher Sarah who he described as being gentle, patient and encouraging. He especially liked the fact that she never talked loudly but always spoke in a quiet calm voice. He explained that whenever his wife tried to help him at home it didn't work because she would "lift" her voice and "whenever she lift her voice I get scared...at school the teachers don't raise their voice. They are calm."

Ralph feels that reading and writing is very important to a person. Without the ability to read and write, he says, "it feels like something in you is lost, inside you. If you can read and write you have your whole self!" He feels that he could be doing

much better in life if he could only read and write. He has ambitions of running his own plumbing business if he can learn to read and write better so that he can make out lists of materials to be ordered and not be cheated. He talks about the importance of writing and reading on his job as a plumber in terms of finding people's addresses, reading road signs on the highways and streets, filling out orders for people, writing notes to his boss, or reading notes and instructions that customers have left him.

In general Ralph feels supported by his family at home in his efforts to go back to school, although he says it is often too noisy at home to study: "Noise steals my concentration". Instead, he studies late at night after everyone has gone to bed and it gets quiet. He speaks of the importance of having quiet and no distractions in order to concentrate on his studies.

Learning to read and write was a big thrill for Ralph. He has started learning to write letters to his family and friends. He claims that learning to write is more important than math because "you can't communicate with someone through arithmetic the way one could by writing a letter." Writing as communication is obviously very important to Ralph. He explains that if you get a letter in the mail, "How you going to know what it says? You can't read the message!" He also describes the importance of sharing writing with others when he wrote his first piece: "After you read, everyone write on a little piece of paper how they feel about it. I still have my papers of writing and I plan to keep it till I die to show other people." In addition he

describes learning to write as giving him more confidence: "I feel more firm now."

Ralph talks a lot about the importance of the connection between reading and writing. He explains that "writing makes you know the words better", and that reading gives you "a picture of how the words look in your mind". He explains that good readers always know how to pronounce words, and never stumble when reading. Poor readers (he calls himself a poor reader) have trouble breaking words down into letter sounds and stumble a lot when reading. However, Ralph explains that good writers don't always know how to spell a word and will use a dictionary. He seems to acknowledge that even a good writer might not be perfect while composing a piece.

Observation (Appendix K1, K2)

Although Ralph was an affectionate and gregarious young man, he could easily become upset or anxious. He responded best to teachers who had soft, quiet voices and took a gentle manner with him. He preferred women teachers for this reason, and seemed anxious about being taught by a man who might "yell at me" or be less patient. This was most likely a result of his traumatic experiences with being beaten as a child. The classroom was a place which Ralph had always experienced as "not safe" and it was difficult for him to relax and concentrate on his writing. One always had the sensation that Ralph still felt "not safe", as if subconsciously he half expected someone to sneak up behind him with a cane and hit him across the head. Thus, it was revealing

when he came to class one day wearing a tee-shirt that said: "Those With The Weapons Make The Rules".

Signs of Ralph's anxiety and poor concentration were demonstrated by his endless strategies for procrastination and restlessness. It often took Ralph 30-40 mintues to start writing. He would rearrange the contents of his knapsack, sharpen all his pencils several times, look through his writing folder, get up and go to the bathroom, talk to his neighbor, get a cup of coffee, stretch, etc. When he would finally start writing, he would stop frequently to sound out words, correct words for spelling, erase and rewrite to make words look neater, spend inordinate amounts of time looking words up in his dictionary, and ask other people how to spell words. He also frequently would pause while writing, stare up at the ceiling and let out a big sigh. It seemed difficult for him to stay concentrated on his writing. As Ralph himself said, "Sometimes my mind slips; I should be at my job today." Ralph sighed a lot, which was possibly due to a combination of frustration with writing and/or other worries on his mind. Overall, Ralph probably spent only about 25 percent of the writing time actively engaged in writing.

Spelling was particularly troublesome for Ralph and may be one reason why he spent so little time actively engaged in writing. Ralph explained that spelling limited his expression of ideas: "Spelling has me slowed. If I start a story and an idea comes, by the time I find the words, I lose the story." And yet it was difficult for Ralph to learn to draw a line when he didn't know how to spell a word and return to it later. For example, when

one of the teachers read his piece about Jamaica and asked him for more information about the sugar cane fields, Ralph drew a picture with his pencil, commenting, "Its easy to talk about, but hard to write about with all the blanks" (meaning all the lines for words he didn't know how to spell).

Ralph's reluctance to use lines led him constantly to interrupt his composing in order to look up a word in the dictionary or sound it out. In addition, he felt that spelling had to be perfect. This was probably a result of his early schooling where he was humiliated for not knowing how to spell words and where perfection was emphasized: "I erase because I forgot a word or it doesn't look good. Ever since I was a kid, I want the writing to look round and straight".

Ralph's concern for perfection might be another reason why he found it difficult to write. For example, Ralph explained one day that he was having difficulty getting started because there were too many ideas jostling around in his head. When asked, "What keeps you from jotting down all your ideas like in free-writing?" he responded, "Cause I have to choose. I don't know which ones to use. I have to think of the most appropriate ideas." Ralph's concern for the "appropriate ideas" suggests that he believes one must figure out the "correct words" or the "correct ideas" first before one can begin writing. As a result, Ralph would try to compose everything in his head first rather than seeing the act of writing as a way to sort out his ideas on paper. Thus, although he spent most of his time getting ready to

write, he never really felt that his words or ideas were "perfect" enough to put down on paper. In this case, it was Ralph's concept of writing that interfered with his ability to compose.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. OBSERVATIONS

Based on the data gathered, the following observations were arrived at in response to the original research questions posed.

1. To what extent are students influenced by the lessons?

Some students seemed more open to being influenced by the lessons than others. For example, Mamie's concern for leads and the use of lines for words she didn't know how to spell, came from the classroom lessons taught. Betty's writing was influenced by the lessons as evidenced by the stategies she used for revision by cutting and pasting, a technique which she had been taught in class. Betty also explained that she had learned how to underline for words she didn't know how to spell so as not to interrupt her train of thought.

Ralph, on the other hand, seemed the least susceptible to learning from the class lessons. In general he seemed more easily distracted and had poorer attention than Betty or Mamie. He also did not participate as easily in share sessions. He seemed overall more rigid in his learning patterns, and less open to change or trying new strategies for writing, perhaps because of his more traumatic learning experiences in the past which made him anxious as a writer.

2. How much actual time is spent writing versus other activities (like getting coffee, going to the bathroom, talking with other students, looking up words in the dictionary, etc.)?

Again, some students seemed to have better concentration than other students while writing. Mamie and Betty, for example, both seemed very self-directed and had specific strategies for getting started. Betty would look through her folder of pieces and either begin where she had left off or start a new piece. Mamie would look through her box of words for the day, review her previous work and get down to writing within five to ten minutes. Both women had the ability to concentrate on their writing and seemed able to shut out the activities in the classroom, to the extent sometimes of also ignoring the teacher's lessons.

The only real sources of interruption for Mamie and Betty were their concerns over spelling. They would occasionally stop the flow of their writing in order to ponder over one word on the page by sounding out each letter of the word either silently or aloud, and trying out different spellings by writing the word, erasing, re-writing, etc. Overall, it is estimated that for Betty and Mamie approximately 25 percent of their time was spent on concerns with spelling. The remaining 75 percent of their time was spent in writing.

Ralph, on the other hand, was the one student who spent most of his time not writing. Ralph was very anxious as a writer and used numerous strategies to stall. He was also easily distracted by anything going on in the environment around him. This was in

accord with his interview where he explained that even at home he had to wait for everyone else to go to bed so that he could concentrate. He stressed the need for quiet in order for him to write. As a result, the classroom environment was a difficult place for students like Ralph to spend any quality time on writing.

Ralph also frequently interrupted the flow of his writing to worry over the spelling of a word, often for long periods of time in which he would sound out the word, consult the dictionary, erase and re-write the word, and/or consult with other students at the table about the spelling of the word. As a result of the frequent interruptions due to spelling, stalling strategies, and distractions from the classroom environment, a whole hour could easily go by for Ralph during which time he would write only a couple of sentences on the page.

On average Ralph would spend approximately 25 percent of his time in actual writing (the reverse from Mamie and Betty). The remaining 75 percent of the time was taken up by concerns over spelling, various stalling strategies or distractions.

3. <u>What is the level of interaction and participation of adult students with their peers?</u>

Different levels of interaction with peers were observed in both formal and informal writing around the table. When sitting at a table writing informally, one of the most frequent interactions between students was around spelling. One or two students often kept a dictionary on the table and they would stop occasionally

to look up a word while soliciting another student's help. Help with spelling usually consisted of a scrap piece of paper on the table on which Ralph, for example, would write the word "butr" for "butter" and then consult with Mamie who would correct it to "buter". Then a third student would enter in and supply the missing "t" so than between all three students they would figure out the correct spelling. At other times students would engage in small debates or discussions over whether or not the word "butter" had one 't' or two 't's. Discussions over spelling were frequent and ongoing as students helped share word meanings and word spellings with each other.

A second level of interaction that occurred was informal sharing of personal events, gossip, and advice on how to solve practical problems like where to go for good health care, or how to pay a phone bill. Students sometimes brought in letters or photos of family to share with other students. These discussions, far from idle gossip, often led to productive results in writing. For example, when Mamie was writing a letter home to her family, Ralph decided he would start writing letters to his family. Likewise, when Betty was writing a piece about her nephew, she and Mary got into a discussion about their families. The following week, Mary decided to write about her nephew. Another example is when Ralph was writing a piece about how to stop drugs, other students at the table offered their experiences and opinions about drugs. Ralph then incorporated many of their ideas into his writing.

There were very few informal interactions where students consulted each other about how to revise their piece. The only interactions that took place when students shared their writing and gave feedback, were in the more structured share group sessions led by the teachers. Within these more structured group sessions, Mamie, for example, asked her peers very specifically to tell her whether or not her lead was interesting and her meaning clear. Here the most common form of response from peers was to offer helpful suggestions or comments about the piece. Students also asked questions if the writing confused them, and often their questions led the writer to revise. For example, students pointed out to Mamie that they were not clear about who "Bill" was in her piece. As a result, Mamie added more information in order to clarify to the other students his character and the role he played in her story.

4. How much informal learning goes on between students?

Related to question #3, the researchers concluded here that a great deal of informal learning goes on among students in terms of exchanging ideas around spelling, sharing ideas that enhance their general knowledge and that may lead to writing on new topics; getting feedback on writing to check whether or not the message is clear, and seeing new approaches to writing.

B. PROTOCOL ANALYSIS

Based on 1) informal interviews with students in class about their writing behaviors and 2) insights gained from the composing aloud protocols, the following conclusions were arrived at in

response to the research questions posed for the composing aloud protocol:

1. What are students thinking when they pause in their writing?

Analysis of the composing aloud protocol showed that the majority of times when a student paused in their writing, they were doing one of four things: 1) Trying to figure out how to spell the word they were about to write. For example in Mamie's protocol, line 45, she stopped to figure out how to spell the word "else"; 2) Making decisions about word choice. For example, whenever students stopped to search for the "right word", or said things like, "I put this word down, but it's not the right word", or "I'm trying to think of the word I want to use here"; 3) Pausing to formulate the next sentence in their mind before writing. For example, in lines 32-33, when asked why she paused, Mamie replied: "I was thinking about how to write this sentence"; 4) Less frequently, students paused in order to make decisions about more global planning of their piece such as, 'I wonder if I should put this sentence here or save it for later."

6. Why do students sometimes stop in the middle of writing a piece and return to the beginning to re-read?

Re-reading seemed to serve three functions for the students observed:

1. To regain one's place after one's thought process was interrupted either from pausing to figure out the spelling of a word, or being interrupted by another student or teacher to ask a question.

2. To clarify for meaning and word choice, as in lines 35 where Mamie re-reads her first sentence and realizes she has left out the word "was".

3. Re-reading as a writing behavior that Perl calls "retrospective structuring", or what she has observed as a "shuttling back and forth on the page between composing the next sentence to advance their ideas and then backtracking, re-reading, and digesting what has been written in order to advance the next idea (pp. 330-331; Appendix G)."

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the observations and tentative answers to the research questions formulated, the researchers next attempted to draw some conclusions about the writing behavior of adult literacy students as compared to children as emergent writers, college age basic writers, and adult education students.

Similar to children's emergent literacy, our adult beginning writers seemed to go through many of the same developmental stages. Most striking was the use of invented spelling; reversal of letters in the more beginning stages of writing; sub-vocalizing of words while writing; spelling words with consonants first like 'dg' for "dog" and later on in the developmental process filling in the missing vowels; and the reversal of letters which are easily confused such as 'd' and 'b', or 'd' and 'p'. Similar to children, the adults in our study also focused on their own meaning with little awareness of making their ideas

explicit to an outside audience. In other words, we had the feeling that students wrote mostly for themselves and for their own purposes.

The adults observed were different from children, however, in that they seemed more self-conscious about the need to spell correctly than children and less willing to experiment and play with language and take risks. This may be because adults are more conscious than children about the the ways in which they are judged in the outside world based on both their spelling and grammar and the appearance of their writing.

In general children are less encumbered than the adults by negative feelings and taboos around writing. Children also mix drawing and writing freely whereas adults do not spontaneously draw pictures to aid their writing unless asked to do so.

Lack of spontaneity and self-consciousness of adults in the study about the appearance of their writing is much more similar to the writing behavior of basic writers in college. Like Sondra Perl's students, our adult literacy students frequently interrupted their writing process to hyper-edit and obsess over the spelling and appearance of their writing. They also showed similar patterns of shuttling from writing to re-reading back to writing in order to advance the meaning of the text on the page. Unlike the basic writer, though, the adult literacy students observed in our study seemed less focused on grammar, perhaps because they may have had less exposure to formal schooling practices which makes them less focused on grammar and punctuation rules. As a

result, the adult literacy students tended to focus more on the importance of getting their meaning across rather than worrying so much about grammatical errors, the only exception being their concerns for spelling.

Last of all, our adult literacy students had much in common with other adult learners by having to juggle many complex factors in their lives in order to attend school. For example, Mamie and Ralph both had to work full time in order to support their families while going to school. Study time for them was limited either because they were too exhausted after work, or there were house chores to be done, or it was too noisy to study. In addition, the adult literacy students showed that they responded best to learning when they could discuss and write about topics of practical or personal concern, such as being able to write letters to relatives, or improve writing to get a job promotion, or writing about the homeless. What was most different about the adult literacy students in our study from adult learners in other studies (white lower to middle class, was the specific ways in which they felt excluded from society by being shut out of housing, jobs, promotions, and educational opportunities as a result of being both illiterate and members of a minority group. Unlike white lower to middle class adult learners with basic literacy skills, the students in our study were acutely aware of discriminations leveled against them which reached far beyond whether or not they could read or write. They knew that learning to read and write would not guarantee either jobs or job promotions, nor could it guarantee better housing. Foremost for

the adult literacy students in our program were again the practical and personal benefits: writing a letter; being able to read road signs; not getting cheated any more about money; feeling better about oneself; being able to communicate one's thoughts and feelings on paper to others.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of the study, led the two teacher-researchers to make the following changes in teaching the Saturday Writing Class.

A. Implications for Teaching

1. The observations of Ralph led to an awareness that some students are more easily distracted by the classroom environment. As a result, students like Ralph are now encouraged to find a quiet room or more isolated location in the library where they can concentrate better.

2. The observations of students writing in class led to an awareness that the typical hour of writing was not enough time for most students to write due to the constant interruptions over spelling, consultations with other students, re-reading, and searching for the right words. As a result, the writing time was extended to one and a half hours.

3. All three students expressed some frustration with using blanks in place of words they did not know how to spell. Their complaint was that if too much time lapsed, they could no longer remember what they were trying to say when they would go

back to re-read. As a result, the teachers switched to using shorter and more frequent conferences with each student to help students fill in the blanks while writing so that they would be more willing to utilize this technique. The frequent conferencing helped both to reduce the students' anxiety and encourage students to take more risks with using blanks and invented spelling.

B. Implications for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, there are several areas that could benefit from further research.

1. More research needs to be done on the kind of concepts and values which adult literacy students have about writing. For example, why are students so overly concerned about the appearance of their writing? Is it because of previous schooling experiences, or because of ways in which society judges people's writing?

2. Related to the previous question is: Why do adult literacy students have so much difficulty with spelling? Why is it harder for them to take risks with invented spelling than children? Why is spelling so important to adult learners?

3. The one composing aloud protocol that was done with Mamie proved to be so revealing of her writing processes, that a more in-depth study would prove useful in gaining additional knowledge about the ways in which adult literacy students are both similar and different from the basic writer.

In conclusion, although the teacher-researchers learned a great deal from the study about the composing processes of adult literacy students, there is still more to be learned. The study showed that the writing behavior of adult literacy students - while similar in many ways to the writing behaviors of children, basic writers and other adult learners - is uniquely shaped by differences in educational background, notions of print, and awareness of societal discriminations against them as "minorities" and "illiterates". These differences must be addressed in order to achieve a more effective teaching for adult literacy students in the Saturday Writing Class.

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